

February 16, 2012

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20540

Dear Mr. Secretary:

You are no doubt aware of the issue of water contamination at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. Studies have already confirmed that the contaminants present in the drinking water from 1957 to 1985 are associated, in varying degrees, with a host of serious health problems. VA, too, has acknowledged the seriousness of the issue through the establishment of a specialized unit to adjudicate claims based on exposure to the harmful carcinogens. I now ask you to take the next step and open VA's hospital doors to treat veterans who may be sick because of their exposure, but who are otherwise ineligible to enroll in the VA healthcare system due to their priority group status.

According to Congressional hearing records, the Obama Administration conceded in 2009 that "VA could, in accordance with the regulatory process, revise its enrollment regulations to establish in priority 8 an additional subcategory for Veterans who are potentially affected by the contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune." Thus, your taking action now to open VA's healthcare system to these sick veterans is not only legally permissible, it is likely the surest, quickest, and most cost-effective way to do it (as opposed to waiting on a Congressional mandate).

Mr. Secretary, in the budget just released VA admits that it was provided nearly \$3 billion more than revised estimates suggest was necessary for Fiscal Year 2012. The budget lists some of the priorities VA would like to address with those resources; I'm asking that you include Camp Lejeune veterans among them. The time for studying this issue is over. They need our help, and VA has the legal authority and resources to provide it immediately.

As always, I stand ready to work with you. I look forward to your favorable response.

Sincerely,

Jeff Miller
Chairman